

**Statement of
Bill Avey, Lewis & Clark National Forest Supervisor/Acting Helena National Forest Supervisor
September 11 Environmental Quality Council**

Chairman Brendan and members of the Environmental Quality Council, my name is Bill Avey. I'm the Supervisor of the Lewis & Clark National Forest, as well as also serving as the Acting Supervisor of the Helena National Forest. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee today regarding the Upper Tenmile watershed.

- The headwaters of the 69,500-acre Tenmile watershed are located to the west of the City of Helena, much of which is located on the Helena Ranger District of the Helena National Forest.
- The area has served as the municipal watershed for the City of Helena for over 100 years. It's provided 70% of the city's water supply (nearly 100% in all but summer months), and has been a reliable source of drinking water as the City has grown. In addition, the watershed contains a significant number of homes and other private property, and is known for its recreation opportunities, and for its wildlife and fisheries habitat, among others resource values. It also has an extensive legacy of hard-rock and placer mining throughout its upper reaches, with a large CERCLA "Superfund" site for abandoned mine cleanup being managed by the US EPA.
- The watershed currently is facing several challenges:
 - Substantial tree mortality The mountain pine beetle is native to Montana but typically found at much lower levels in the landscape. The recent spike in activity is due to several factors all aligning at the same time – widespread 100-year old lodgepole from the Fires of 1910, drought, highly effective fire suppression for decades, and climate change. The Helena National Forest has experienced an infestation of mountain pine beetles on 600,000 acres, or 2/3 of the Forest, as well as 488 miles of road at risk from high levels of pine beetle mortality. More specific to the Tenmile watershed, we are dealing with an infestation which has impacted 95% of the watershed. Based on what has been seen elsewhere, these stands of trees are generally expected to begin falling within five years after they die, which would be 2014.
 - Elevated threat of large-scale wildfire in the watershed: The current external heavy surface fuel loading from the falling dead trees will create conditions in which a fire would likely burn intensely with a long duration and as such it would be difficult to suppress. An intense fire of this nature would pose a risk to infrastructure as well as to the people who live in the area. It could also lead to

post-fire effects such as erosion, sedimentation, ash deposition, and debris flows that may impact the flume and reservoir.

- As you can see, the challenges facing the watershed are significant. Here's what we are working on with the City of Helena and others to address those challenges:
 - 1. Our initial focus was to secure critical access/egress by removing hazard trees along the road into the watershed. A Decision Notice was signed in 2010, calling for clearing of 1 ½ tree lengths from the road. That project has largely completed through timber sales which resulted in treatment of 3205 acres and a volume sold amounting to 72,255 CCF between FY10-12. This is an example of a project which helps protect the public while accounting for critical resources such as fish, wildlife, soil and water quality, while also providing economic opportunities for our partners in the timber industry without whom we could not implement these sorts of projects.
 - 2. During the past year, we've focused our attention on the Chessman Reservoir and the flume, to better protect the City's water storage & delivery system, something that we hope to begin implementing later this year.
 - 3. It is also our hope to continue to work to address the larger issue of forest health in the drainage, to better protect homeowners and infrastructure within the watershed, along with surrounding areas. This is a priority issue for me, the Helena Ranger District, and the Helena National Forest.
- In closing, I want to stress that the Forest simply cannot do it alone, especially during these challenging fiscal times. I would like to thank the City of Helena for being such a critical partner in this. We are committed to a continued partnership with them, as well as working with other organizations and entities such as the US EPA, Rocky Mountain Research Station Fire Lab, State of Montana, rural fire departments, and Tri County Firesafe Working Group. I want to express my appreciation for all of the support we've received so far.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about what the Helena National Forest has accomplished, as well as what it is working to accomplish, in the Ten mile watershed. I will remain available for questions.